Alone Together

Story: Alone Together
Storylink: https://www.fanfiction.net/s/10002488/1/
Category: Fire Emblem
Genre: Angst/Hurt/Comfort
Author: littlev123
Authorlink: https://www.fanfiction.net/u/2559947/
Last updated: 01/07/2014
Words: 8198
Rating: T
Status: Complete
Content: Chapter 1 to 1 of 1 chapters
Source: FanFiction.net

Summary: A year after the end of the game, Robin has become a shell of her former self. She leaves Chrom's castle, unable to bear the memories that haunt her every step. Only when she finds a kindred spirit in an equally broken person will she find the way toward the light. Rated T for blood, violence, and dark themes. Oneshot.

Chapter 1: Alone Together

A/N: Pairings: one sided Mark/Lyn and one sided Chrom/(female)Robin with mentioned Chrom/Sumia and Hector/Lyn.

In a fanciful bedroom lit only by a single candle to keep the darkness of night at bay, a weary figure leaned over her desk as she finished placing the last of her chosen items into a travel bag. She closed the bag and turned, observing the rest of the room one last time.

This room, situated in an extravagant castle, had been her home for the past year. Chrom had given it to her, the great tactician Robin, to live in since she had no place to stay after the war. An ornate wooden desk was tucked into a corner beside the large cushioned bed. A sliver of the dark world outside was visible between the curtains and a wide wardrobe stood opposite the bed. If she were to open it Robin knew that she would see a few of her own more expensive outfits still hanging in there; bringing such luxurious clothing along would be impractical.

The tactician glancing at the desk behind her, barely able to recognize the place where she would spend night after night studying tomes and maps. Now all that met her eye was solid wood and empty memories. She reached into her pocket, pulled out a piece of paper, and placed it on the desk. As she moved back she suddenly paused, fully realizing the finality of what she was about to do.

Scrawled on that note was a simple goodbye. No fancy words, only that there was somewhere she needed to go and a promise to return someday.

Was this really the right course of action? She could just unpack everything, tear up the note, and go to bed like nothing ever happened. She could wake up in the morning, plaster a smile on her face and pretend that she was still the same person she used to be. She could…

The very thought made her stomach twinge with something akin to nausea, quickly putting an end to the possibility. She couldn't live a façade anymore, not if she wanted to survive. Over the months she had begun to see startling changes in her diet and stamina. The grand castle meals held no taste, forcing her to choke down her food but inevitably causing her to eat less, while she had to push her slowly tiring body more and more every day every in order to keep up in her daily sparring sessions. Her brilliant mind knew exactly what would happen if she stayed any longer.

Robin grabbed her bag off of the desk and walked over to the closed door. She pulled up her hood, allowing the shadows to mask her face, and opened the door.

A glance down both hallways revealed that they were empty; not that Robin needed confirmation to know that. She had long ago familiarized herself with the routine of the guards. Still, it helped to calm the nervousness stirring in her heart. As quietly as possible, she closed the door behind her and snuck down the left corridor.

Her feet traveled lightly across the stone, remembering how she had once watched Gaius move when he had been trying to sneak around Frederick to reach the food storage. She wasn't nearly as skilled as the thief, but any small advantage would help.

She headed down the hall and made another turn. Just as she did, however, she hesitated and glanced back to an adjacent hallway.

Down that corridor she knew were Chrom's and Lissa's bedrooms.

Sadness tugged at Robin's heart. How long would it be before she saw them again?

She had become close to Lissa over the years to the point where they spoke and acted more like sisters than just friends. Lissa never hid her emotions from the tactician, her expressions always obvious and genuine. That fact relieved Robin greatly; in a world where she had to search behind peoples' facades and masks to find the real person underneath, it felt like a fresh breath of air to see someone so honest with her thoughts.

Not far from Lissa's bedroom was Chrom's room. Inside Robin knew that both Chrom and Sumia would be peacefully sleeping the night away, most likely held in each other's arms.

The sullenness turned into a kindle of warmth surrounded by a tight ache that reverberated throughout her entire being.

Chrom.

The one person who didn't smother her with great expectations, the one person who never for one second believed that

she was only a tool for war, the one person who she could confide all her deepest and darkest fears to without worry of being seen as weak, the one person she loved…

And the one person she could never have.

Robin forced her body to turn away, although something within her felt like it was tearing. Banishing all of the painful thoughts away, she fled using the small kitchen door reserved for servants.

Using a path that lead out to a small side gate, she soon reached the exit. She peered through the bars to observe the guard stationed there. There he stood, his back supported by the stone wall and his head dropped down onto his chest. His chest plate moved in and out slowly; the languid breathing of someone asleep.

If the situation weren't so urgent, Robin would have sighed. She had specifically asked for that particular guard to be given a position during the daytime a few days ago; seems like he hadn't been told yet. Even so, she guessed that she should be thankful that it would be easier to leave.

Robin carefully unlatched the gate and swung it open far enough for her to get through. She winced when the metal creaked and her eyes darted toward the soldier. To her relief, his breathing only hitched for a moment before settling back into a regular easygoing pattern. She slipped through and closed it behind her.

She turned around to get one last look at the castle that she had resided in for the past six months. As much as she wanted to call it home, it had never held the familiarity and comfort of one.

After a few more moments she started walking away. She closed off her mind and allowed her subconscious to choose a direction. She had no idea where she wanted to go; all she knew was that it was not here.

Once the night had dissolved into day and the city was well out of sight she finally became aware enough to realize that she would have to stop soon for a break. Hunger gnawed at her stomach, insisting that she eat. It was both a pesky need and somewhat of a relief—it was the first time in a long while since she had actually wanted to eat.

She came across what appeared to be a small abandoned camp. The soft grass was flattened in a square shape, indicating that a tent had been sitting there not long ago. A few feet away several charred branches mixed with ashes and stones formed a campfire.

Robin stepped forward to examine the fire closer. A few red embers still smoldered, unwilling to go out but unable to burn the thick sticks above it. If someone were to use smaller pieces of wood and coaxed it with wind, it could easily begin to blaze…

The wretched smell of burnt skin and a pained scream filled the air. Robin whirled around, dread rushing through her veins.

Olivia lay on the ground, her fair face twisted in agony and dampened by tears. Some ways ahead a fire mage, safely out of close combat range, prepared another attack.

Stahl sprang forward from his position beside Sully and, his horse's hooves pounding across the earth, galloped toward him with sword held high. In one quick swipe he ended the surprised mage's life.

Robin called out to Lissa before dropping to her knees beside Olivia. On the back of her left calf angry red blistering marred her delicate skin.

"Lissa…Lissa's coming…" Robin helplessly informed. Olivia gave a small nod, showing she understood, but kept bit her lip to keep back more tears.

That wasn't supposed to happen, not to kind Olivia. She should have been farther back, away from the main action. Robin silently cursed. Why hadn't she checked to make sure that everyone was safe in the formation? She had glanced over the battlefield which was similar to the one in the last battle and went with the formation they used last time. That kind of laziness hurt one of her comrades!

Robin moved aside for Lissa, who immediately raised her staff to begin her work.

"How…how noticeable is it…?" Olivia's voice trembled.

Realization struck Robin like a stampeding bull. Olivia was a dancer, someone whose livelihood depended on the beauty of her body and its movements. If something were to scar it…

Lissa gave her a reassuring smile as the soft glow of her healing magic surrounded the wound. "Don't worry. It's not very pretty right now, but just give me a minute and you'll never be able to tell it was there."

"Really?" Olivia questioned quietly, barely daring to hope that the other was telling the truth. When Lissa nodded, she let out a sigh of relief, as did Robin.

Robin scattered the charred sticks and stomped out the embers with her boot. She forced the memory to dissipate like the smothered sparks as they choked and died under her heel.

Vaguely noting that her stomach no longer begged for sustenance, she sat down in the flattened grass and pulled out a shiny red apple. She bit into it and felt juice wet her tongue, but its sweetness was lost to her uncaring taste buds. Even if she wasn't hungry, she knew that she would have to eat something in order to keep up her energy.

When she finished chewing the last portion of the fruit she looked around contemplatively before tossing the core next to the remains of the campfire. She picked up her bag and continued on her trek.

Calm, empty plains surrounded her. The peaceful landscape temporarily put her normally racing mind at ease; it felt as if she could simply get lost in the vastness and no one would ever be able to find her.

After a while the ground under her feet changed from rolling grass hills to rocky stone. The sun beat relentlessly down on her dark cloak and her hood.

She reached up to wipe the sweat from her forehead when her right foot landed on a couple of loose rocks. They rolled underneath her heel and in her effort to keep her balance dropped her bag.

Robin sighed, looking down at where her pack lay. At least she hadn't fallen, she supposed. That wasn't nearly as bad when—

Robin's foot caught in a wide crack in the dry ground, causing her to pitch forward. Caught by surprise, she instinctively stretched out her arms in a vain attempt to stay standing.

A hand caught her wrist and brought her fall to a sudden halt. She let out a small breath of relief as the person pulled her back onto her feet.

"You alright?" Chrom asked, releasing her arm.

She smiled, the warmth from his hand lingering for a moment before fading. " Yeah, thanks."

"Good. I was expecting someone to have trouble on this field, but I didn't think that you would be the one who would trip." He stated, humor dancing in his eyes.

She rubbed the back of her head sheepishly. "Oops. It's a good thing that didn't happen at the start of the battle." She allowed her arm to fall back to her side before looking around. "We're almost done here. Sumia and Miriel are taking care of the stragglers—"

"Robin! Chrom!"

They both turned to see Cordelia, her lance dripping with blood.

"What's wrong?!" Chrom demanded, his grip tightening on the Falchion.

"Sully's injured! She was attacked and fell!" Cordelia exclaimed, lowering her pegasus until its hooves touched the ground. "Where's Lissa?"

"I'm here!" Lissa panted as she came to a stop in front of the pegasus. Without needing to be prompted Cordelia held out her free hand and helped Lissa onto the saddle behind her.

"Hurry on ahead! We'll follow you!" Robin ordered, already beginning to run. Cordelia nodded and urged her steed back into the air. Chrom and his tactician hurried over to a high stone wall jutting out of the ground. They skidded to a stop when they realized that the ground dropped abruptly next to the trail behind the wall.

The ground was much more precarious than Robin had guessed. She had sent Sully that way so that she could attack the enemy from behind and thus make the battle end sooner, despite not being able to see past the wall. Such a stupid mistake! Why did she send her somewhere where she herself had no idea what lay beyond it?! A quicker end to the fight was no excuse.

Movement at the bottom caught Robin's attention. She looked down to see Lissa and Cordelia already by a fallen horse. A steadily increasing spot of red stained the animal's hide. Lissa hesitated for a moment before raising her staff and using her healing magic on the horse's wound. Meanwhile Cordelia seemed to be trying to urge the steed up, confusing Robin as to why she would be trying to move the horse already with such an injury.

And then Robin saw why.

Sully was underneath the horse.

Robin and Chrom slid down the rocky incline, small pebbles and stones rolling down with them. When they reached the bottom they rushed over and helped Cordelia in moving the horse. The large animal finally managed to get to its feet and move just far enough to be out of there way, where it then laid back down. Lissa stopped healing the horse and focused her attention on Sully when it was gone.

"What hurts?" Lissa asked, the warm glow of healing magic already surrounding Sully.

"My leg huts like hell…but I don't give a damn about that right now…how's my horse?" she demanded, her teeth gritted in pain.

"I'll check on him." Cordelia offered and headed over to the steed's side. Chrom stood by Lissa, watching as she worked on the knight. Robin stood aside, unaware that her own hand had begun to tremble.

Pain pricked Robin's palm. She glanced down to see her hand clenched into a fist, so tightly that the knuckles shone white. Forcing her hand to open revealed crescent indents in the skin, her fingernails being the guilty party.

She inhaled deeply before letting out the breath slowly, trying to rid herself of the memory like the carbon dioxide leaving her system.

Picking up her bag, she began walking again. She left behind the dry, barren area, hoping in vain that no more memories would assault her mind.

The low rumble of thunder far away prompted Robin to look behind her. Dark storm clouds approached on the horizon. She turned around and hurried on, glad when a few minutes later she spotted a small village in the distance. Familiarity prodded at the back of her mind, but it wasn't until she was almost there that she remembered.

It was Donnel's village.

Donnel…

"Take care of that last soldier, Donnel." Robin ordered, her tired muscles aching for rest. It had been a long and hard battle, requiring all of their strength.

Donnel raised his lance and nodded to show that he heard. Despite his own weariness he readjusted the pot on his head and moved forward, not complaining for a moment.

He approached the wounded enemy soldier who bravely raised his axe despite the blood rushing down his arm.

Donnel lunged forward, unaware of the soldier hiding behind the ballista on a nearby hill. The soldier aimed as the boy came in range and fired—

No!

Robin held her head in her hands, fighting back the tears building in the corners of her eyes. Her frantic breathing filled her ears as she desperately tried to shove the horrible image trying to form in her mind.

She adamantly refused to relive that memory. Not now, not ever. She wouldn't think about hearing the large arrow pierce vital organs, she wouldn't think about the blood that wouldn't stop gushing out, she wouldn't think about the light as it forever disappeared from friendly eyes she wouldn't she wouldn't shewouldn'tshewouldn't—

Something wet landing on her right hand snapped her out of her turmoil. Panting, she glanced up to see that the thick clouds from earlier had completely blocked out the sun's warm rays. A cold wind snuck into her open cloak and chilled her skin. She shivered and, after a moment of hesitation, made her way toward the village.

The ordinary village that was just like all the others and held no emotions toward whatsoever.

The lie couldn't have been any more obvious, but it was all she could do. Maybe, just maybe, if she believed it hard

enough, it would turn out to be true.

She entered the small and only inn of the village and closed the door behind her. The rain drummed on the roof, quick and continuous as the storm worsened.

Robin glanced around the room. A rickety desk off to the side and a few chairs surrounding a table were the only furniture in the main room. She was both relieved and not that there were no other people in the room; on one hand she didn't have to worry about anyone asking her questions, while on the other she wanted someone to distract her from the memory still threatening to spill into her vision.

She walked over to the table and was about to pull out one of the chairs when she felt a light tap on her shoulder. Surprised, she spun around to see a retreating figure head down the hallway in the back that lead to the rooms.

"Hello?" she called out, even though she expected no answer. Despite her better judgment she went into the hallway and paused. One of the doors had been left ajar; an indication for her to enter.

Placing her hand on the doorknob, she paused. This new situation had—thankfully—kicked her brain back into its questioning and calculating mindset. She had only caught a glimpse of green before the person disappeared down the hallway. No one she knew of wore that particular shade, except for maybe Stahl, but she knew that he was still back at the castle. Whoever it was they seemed to want to speak with her in private. She couldn't be sure if they were enemy or ally, so she placed her other hand on the sword at her belt. Curiosity controlling her actions, she slowly opened the door.

The plain room consisted of a drab bed tucked in the corner and a small table in the center. Papers and a box littered the wood and a few tomes were piled up on the bed. Behind the table sat the figure; a young man clothed in a faded green cloak. Brown bangs hiding his forehead peeked out from under his hood and partially obscured his dark eyes. His gaze calmly held hers, emotionless except for the barely noticeable glint in his eye that revealed he was processing and gathering information about the person in front of him just by observing her appearance.

He didn't speak, prompting Robin to glance around the room uncomfortably again. She looked closer at the table and realized what those papers were; wrinkled maps and battle strategy notes. Her eyes widened as something in her mind clicked.

"You're here. Not that I expected otherwise." His quiet voice finally stated.

"You're a tactician, aren't you?" she questioned.

"You already know the answer to that, Robin. But, since I assume you are expecting my confirmation, then yes, I am." He replied.

She stopped herself from asking how he knew her name; she knew she was well known on this continent, so it wouldn't have been too hard to figure out her name.

He shifted his eyes to where her hand was still lightly gripping her sword's hilt briefly before meeting her eyes again. "I assure you, I am no threat. Even if I wanted to attack you it would be for naught; I lack sufficient physical skills. I have heard many a tale of your accomplishments in battle and wished to speak to you."

Robin released her sword and allowed her hand to fall back to her side, mildly surprised by his honesty. She hesitated before she spoke again, however, suspicion still flickering brightly. "…alright, I can accept that. What's your name? And how did you know I would be here? I know it can't be just coincidence."

"You may call me Mark." He responded. "We are very alike, you and I. I knew you would be here because this is the home of your first casualty. Naturally it is the most prominent in your mind."

The memory suddenly pulsed with renewed vigor behind her eyes, draining the blood from her face and tightening her throat. "I…"

"You are seeking atonement. The guilt is consuming you, eating you alive, and the only thing you can think of to make it stop is beg for forgiveness. But there's one problem. You know it won't work."

Robin's heart skipped a beat. His voice remained even and calm, but his intense words echoed in her head and slammed into her heart.

"Even if you somehow obtain forgiveness from the victim's family and friends, you can never forgive yourself. Because you know that the one who made the decision was you, and you alone. That knowledge weighs in your heart like a stone that never fades. Even after you take every precaution and strain your mind to its fullest to avoid casualties, people still

die before your eyes…"

—ear piercing scream as Virion's torso was cut in half—

—blood sprayed like a fountain from Brady's neck while his severed head fell to the ground—

"…and that stone gets heavier and heavier, until it controls everything you do and you lose everything that you once were."

"Shut up! Just…stop it!" Robin screamed. Pure agony twisted her insides and panic overcame her entire being. The unadulterated truth that she had tried to avoid for so long infected her mind and squeezed it until her head felt like it would explode from the pressure. She urgently tried to ignore the words, pretend she hadn't heard them, explain to herself that he was wrong, all at once, but it was already ingrained into her existence and nothing could make it leave.

Her legs moved of their own accord, trying to preserve what was left of her sanity. She dashed out of the room, out of the inn, and into the pouring rain. Sometime along the way her hood had fallen, allowing the drops to pound against her long hair and pelt her skin, as if it too wanted to punish her.

In a state of crisis, her mind blanked and when she was next aware she was inside of a barn. Panting, she sat down and leaned against a wall.

Suddenly, it all came back in a rush. The hopelessness of her situation and the suffocating heaviness in her chest that refused to leave its nest in her heart…

She buried her head in her knees as wet warmth mixed with the rain on her cheeks. Shudders shook her body from the cold, soaked clothes sticking to her skin and the sobs erupting from her soul.

Robin had no idea how long she stayed like that, crying so hard that she struggled to breathe at times. When it finally ended she sat there, exhausted with her eyes red and sore.

Her head ached terribly, but she couldn't summon the energy to care. A languid memory slowly made its way into her mind's eye, reminding her that this was not the first time she had cried like that. She tried to fight back, not wanting to re-experience old pain, but she was too tired to hold it back for long.

Robin collapsed onto the bed roll inside her tent. Any discomfort was ignored by her body, whose shock was slowly ebbing away.

Her eyes stared at the tent's wall, not seeing the fabric but instead the image of the body she had seen mere minutes ago. Donnel, surrounded by blood and with an arrow sticking out of his chest…

Sadness and guilt suddenly tore at her insides and wrenched at her heart. Every breath choked in her tightened throat. Tears developed and streamed from her eyes in small, sorrowful rivers down her trembling face. Grief consumed her mind and allowed nothing else in.

She lay there, wallowing in misery, when something solid and warm touched her shoulder. She blinked once, twice, as she paused to register the sensation. She slowly turned her head and, realizing it was Chrom, who had always believed in her and everything that she did, a rush of impossibly more emotions raged through her.

"*P-Please, just…leave…" she begged through her sobs.*

"*Robin…" his voice was quiet with sadness, but all she could hear was deadly disappointment. Chrom tentatively squeezed her shoulder, hoping the gesture would give her some semblance of comfort.*

For a moment, Robin's tears paused. The warmth in his touch eased the negative feelings, trying to convince her that she did not have to suffer alone.

But then Donnel's lifeless face flashed in her mind, wiping out any sense of refuge.

Donnel was dead. He could never return home and see his family again. She had taken away someone's good friend and someone's beloved son.

Robin's decision had taken someone's life.

Robin was a murderer.

She jerked her shoulder away, his touch suddenly feeling like an accusing flame scorching her guilty soul.

"*Please, Robin...let me help you." He pleaded.*

"*Don't…" she refused.*

"*Why?"*

Because you're Chrom, strong and kind Chrom who should never have to be in the presence of filth like me, was what she wanted to say. How can you want to help someone who killed not only a soldier, but a friend?

"*I want…to be alone…" she whispered instead. She didn't hear any movement, which she expected. He was too caring to immediately leave someone in such a state.*

That was why she couldn't allow him to help a killer of friends like her.

"*Please, Chrom…go…"*

"*…if that's really what you want." He eventually conceded. "But if you do want to see me later, don't hesitate. I want to help you any way I can." After another few seconds of hesitation, he stood and left the tent, leaving her with only her mind to remind her of what she had done.*

"What in tarnation?!"

Robin started as an older woman's voice echoed throughout the previously empty barn. A robust woman nudged a large cow into the building. The animals slowly complied, not hurrying in the least. Once it was finally in enough to close the door, she looked back over at the tactician huddled in the corner.

"Lass, what're ya doin' in my barn?" she questioned. Robin, thankful for the low light that hid her tearstained face, forced her exhausted body to stand.

"I…" her voice cracked. She swallowed thickly, the dry skin of her throat rubbing together like sandpaper.

The other's expression softened. "I'm not mad at ya or anythin'. Just wonderin' is all." After walking over to a shelf and picking up a worn rag, she returned to the cow and began rubbing it down.

"How 'bout you come on inside with me?" she offered as she finished drying the water off of the cow's hide. "You'll freeze to death if ya stay out here."

"I don't want to intrude." Robin stated. Her attempt to be polite sounded hollow despite its sincerity; she did not feel up to interacting with other people at the moment, but her chilled body insisted that it wanted the warmth waiting inside of a house.

"Nonsense. If I didn't want ya I wouldn't have offered. Come on, let's get going before we freeze to death out 'ere."

"…thank you." Robin walked over to her, suddenly all too aware of how much her soaked clothes weighed down her frame. The woman led her to the closest home, a small building consisting of one large main room and two smaller ones. She closed the door behind her, walked up behind Robin, and hooked her fingers into the soaked material of Robin's cloak.

When Robin flinched in surprise, she said, "Let's get this wet thing off you, yeah?"

Before Robin could protest, she had already begun pulling the rain laden cloak from her shoulders. The tactician reluctantly complied and allowed her to remove it, but made certain to remove the mostly dry objects from the pockets before giving it up. She stuffed the possessions into her bag which had only become slightly damp from being underneath her cloak.

"Are you a soldier?" she asked before tossing the wet covering onto a rack near the door, noticing the sword at Robin's belt.

Robin hesitated. "I suppose so."

A frown flickered across her face for a moment before returning to a friendly smile. Robin knew that expression; the other knew that she wasn't telling something. Sadness flashed within her briefly, knowing that at one time she had been able to keep her composure even when in the face of death.

She sat down at a table and gestured for Robin to join. Robin settled in the chair across from her.

"Would you like anything to eat?" she asked.

Robin shook her head.

"Alright then." A few silent seconds passed. "I know it's none of my business, but is somethin' wrong? You seem mighty unhappy over there."

"I'm just tired, that's all." Robin answered.

She shook her head, a serious expression washing over her face. "No, that's not all. I can see it in your eyes. You got that same look in your eyes as I did when my son died."

Foreboding struck Robin like a hammer. "Your…son…?"

"He went off to the army a couple of years ago, recruited by none other than Lord Chrom himself. I didn't want him to go—I was worried, like any mother would be—but he said that was what he wanted to do. So I gave him my permission. And then, over a year later, I was told that he died in battle. At first, I couldn't believe it—my dear Donny was gone, taken from me forever."

Robin's eyes widened and her breath caught in her throat. The name rang in her ears, harshly pounding against the mental wall that held back the horrible memories at bay. The wall was cracking, splintering under the pressure of the terrible emotions breaking their way through.

"I was sad for the longest time," she continued, "I thought it was all my fault for lettin' him go, and I hated myself so much. But then –are you alright?"

"I…I need to l-leave…" she stuttered, her dry mouth struggling to form the words. Her body trembled and her hand shook from where it rested upon the table. She reached forward, hoping to reassure the young woman somehow, but instead Robin violently jumped up from her chair. Her hands gripping her head and her eyes clenched tightly shut, she stepped back until her back hit the closed door.

Carefully, she stood up from her chair in slow movements. "Lass, calm down, okay? You'll be alright, I'll help ya…"

"You wouldn't be saying that if…i-if you knew…" she whispered. "It's all my fault…"

She paused, her eyes lighting up in realization. "It has somethin' to do with Donnel, doesn't it?"

Robin gave a shaky nod.

She opened her mouth and then paused, as if rethinking about what to say. "How about we take a seat and calm down for a little bit? Then ya can tell me as much as ya want…"

Fury mixed with self-deprecation raged through her like an inferno. Icy dismay twisted her insides and fires comprised of guilt burned through any mental barriers she had worked so hard to keep up.

"Y-You wouldn't…be saying that if…you knew what I did…" she choked out.

"I promise, no matter what you've done or who you are, I don't hate you." She said.

"You don't understand!" Robin exclaimed, sinking to her knees. "I was the army's tactician, the one who told him to attack the soldier…and I…I said it was safe, but it wasn't…I didn't see the soldier behind the ready ballista. The soldier fired and…and…"

She kneeled down beside Robin's hunched form and placed a comforting hand on her back. She remained silent, knowing that the younger needed this outlet.

"He's gone and it's all my fault. He put his trust in me…and died because of it. And not just him. Everyone else…even when they saw him die…they still trusted me enough to be their tactician. Why? Why did they do that…? No matter how many people died, they still followed me…and when Chrom tried to help me, I pushed him away. Someone as caring as him shouldn't lower himself for me…especially knowing that I might get him killed too…I'm nothing but a murderer…" She spat out the last word, her exhausted tear ducts still somehow able to form the tears rolling down her face.

Minutes passed with only the sound of Robin's sobs and the rain pounding outside. She gently rubbed light circles into the younger woman's back, similar to how a mother would her child. The experience felt foreign but far from unpleasant—Robin had no memories of when she was a child, and no memories of a time where she had a parental figure to

comfort her.

Finally, when her tears had slowed to a stop, she spoke. "I told ya once, and I'll tell ya again. I don't hate ya."

Robin looked up at her, her red puffy eyes searching the older woman's calm face for any hint of a lie. To her astonished disbelief, she could find nothing of the sort. "But…but how can you? After all that I've done?"

"Because I know Donnel trusted ya, and that's enough for me. I'd be lyin' if I said I hadn't wanted to hate ya, and even myself for letting him go. But then I got to thinkin'; Donnel wouldn't want me to beat myself up over it. Why, it'd be just plain rude to waste my life when he doesn't even have his anymore. You just gotta face the facts and move on."

The tactician didn't respond, awed by this woman's advice. For so long, Robin had been searching for some way to make peace with the demons tormenting her soul, and here it was, simply but efficiently laid out for her.

"…you're right." Robin finally replied. She had been doing nothing but pushing aside her emotions in order to avoid feeling the numerous burdens she had accumulated. But by doing that she was only making the problem worse. As hard as it was, she needed to confront those emotions, and accept them for what they were. If she did that she might finally be able to live the life those who died wanted her to, happy and content. Much easier said than done, but just knowing that there was a solution relieved some of the pressure tightening her heart.

"Thank you so much." Robin said, wiping the drying tears with the back of her hand.

"No problem dear. Now, how 'bout you stay the night? That storm's not liftin' 'til morning."

Emotionally exhausted, Robin quickly agreed. She needed to rest after such a strenuous outpour of sentiments.

The last thing she thought before she fell asleep on a lumpy but homey bed, was she needed to save the one other person who needed her revelation as much as she did.

Dear Mark,

I hope you're doing well. I know you are good at taking care of yourself, but you seem to have a knack for finding trouble. Then again, you were the one who always helped us get out of trouble during battle, so I'm sure you're fine.

You probably think that it's a little silly to be asking questions when I know that you won't answer back, but that's alright. I just have this feeling that you enjoy these letters. Besides, whenever I drop one off at the tavern, they're always gone within the next week. I'll be honest; I have tried before to hide out in the tavern to try to catch you when you pick up the letters, but you always seem to slip by somehow. I should have known better than to try to find you when you don't want to be found.

It's been over a year since the last time I saw you. I miss you. We all do. Even though I would love to see you again, I understand that you must have your reasons.

There's not much going on here in Ostia. Hector is finally taking my advice to take a break every once in a while; even a marquess needs to rest sometime. I've heard that Elliwood's child is due any day now. I wonder if it will be a boy or a girl? Either way it will have great parents to raise it.

By the way, I heard a rumor yesterday about you. Some people were saying that they heard you were going to leave Lycia. Is that true? If so, I wish you well, and I hope that you return someday. Remember, you always have a home here.

Sincerely,

Lyn

Mark finished reading through the worn, wrinkled note. Each individual word, read over innumerable times over the course of several years, was as familiar to him as the back of his hand. However, unlike the many tomes and maps he had burned into his memory, they held a special, meaningful place among the strategies and tactics drilled into his mind.

He traced the last word gently with his fingertips, as if the smallest touch could make the treasure crumble in his hands. The name warmed and soothed the tactician's heart, but at the same time sent pangs of longing and regret echoing through his chest.

After a few more moments he folded the letter and opened the small wooden box sitting on the table in front of him. He

gingerly placed it on top of the letters already inside, gazed at the precious papers for a few seconds, and then closed it.

He let out a long sigh, filled with a mixture of irritation and disappointment. What had happened to him? Sure, he had never been particularly kind—a fact that many of his friends had pointed out—but he had crossed a line with what he said to Robin, and he knew it. Reopening old wounds and rubbing in salt was not what he had planned to do, but unfortunately that was exactly what he had done.

Abusing her feelings, feelings he knew all too well, was villainous at best.

If Lyn were to see him now…would she even recognize him?

That question tore at his battered heartstrings, yanking and pulling as harshly as the day he heard about Lyn's engagement to Hector.

All of the past pains suddenly began to pile up, trying to choke him with their brutality and ruthlessness. He swallowed thickly as if the emotions were a physical object, hoping to crawl down his throat and rip apart the tactician's heart piece by agonizing piece—

"Stop." Mark ground out through gritted teeth. Focus, he needed to regain his focus on something that wasn't slowly killing him from the inside out.

Think. What was he going to do now? He had ruined his chances of becoming…something…to Robin. Acquaintance? Confidant? Friend? He wasn't quite sure, but whatever he had wanted, he was going to have to live without. That was just fine, he decided, ignoring the sliver of his mind that screamed in protest at continuing his lonely journey.

He remembered that when he had first arrived on the continent, barely a few hours had passed before he had heard about the talented tactician who helped Lord Chrom win a recent war. Something within him had stirred, temporarily jerking him out of his careless and nearly emotionless state. He finally felt the need to do something other than voyaging farther and farther away from Lycia. He wanted nothing more than to meet her.

Of course, it had gone far from well, and it was all his fault. The only thing left for him to do is to continue his pointless wandering.

He glanced out the window, where the sun was just beginning to rise. Had he really stayed up all night? Oh well, he wouldn't have been able to achieve a good rest anyway.

Just as he was about to sit up in order to gather his things and leave, someone knocked on his door. He paused in confusion, having not expected anyone.

"Come in." he finally said.

The wooden door opened to reveal Robin with a warm, friendly smile on her face. His eyes widened just the slightest fraction in surprise, but hid it by leaning back in his chair and hiding underneath his long bangs and hood. That expression had to be façade, after what happened.

She closed the door behind her and stepped forward until she was standing in front of the table.

"Sorry about running off like that yesterday." She gave him a sheepish grin.

"That's…alright." For once, Mark actually paused when speaking. He was unsure of what to think of this situation, and that alone made him uneasy.

Her expression softened. She understood his discomfort; in their occupation, they felt vulnerable when things happen that they didn't expect. "Hey, calm down. It's like what you said to me; I'm not here to hurt you. I just want to talk."

Mark nodded but said nothing.

"I understand what happened." Robin began, sadness tinting her features. However, she wasn't masking it or pushing it away. "When you saw me, you saw yourself. You were…you were saying those things to yourself."

Mark blinked. As much as he wanted to deny it, her words seemed to fill in the gaps in his mind, the questions that he couldn't answer. If his back wasn't already pressing against the back of the chair, he would have instinctively moved away; he didn't like the implications of what she said, not one bit. Just because they were true didn't make them hurt any less.

"The thing is," she continued, "is that it was exactly what I felt too. We've both been through a lot, and while our journeys may have differed, the major points are eerily similar."

"I am sure you understand that is not a good thing." Mark bitterly stated.

"Not many are good, I'll admit, but there is still some happiness left for us—"

"How!?" Mark erupted, abruptly standing and causing his chair to fall backwards to the floor. Robin jumped in surprise, startled by the sudden intensity. "We are nothing more than tools! Fate made it so that once our use is over we might as well be dead!"

"I—"

He quickly cut her off. "So much had to be sacrificed! I had to take the burden that no one else could. Because of it I can never have a peaceful slumber again, or pretend that it is not my fault that soldiers…friends…have died." He finally stopped, panting. His fists were clenched at his sides and he glared at the ground.

"…I get it. I really do." Robin quietly informed. "It hurts so much that you want to just run away from it all, because you can't face your friends after knowing what you've done. I know because that's what I did too."

He didn't respond, but his breathing was calming as he listened.

"But I realized something yesterday. As much as you believe that it is our destiny to suffer, that's not true. I don't believe in fate. Even if we can't choose everything that happens to us, we dictate how to respond to it. And we've been thinking all wrong."

"…we have?" Mark tentatively questioned.

"Yes. We've saved people, but we've also…killed…people." Robin stated, hesitating at the admission. "We have to accept that. We have to accept that they're gone, and maybe it was our fault, but that doesn't mean we should beat ourselves up over it. Think about it. Would they want us to be hurting ourselves like this? We're practically dishonoring their memory by letting it consume us."

Mark bristled. How dare she say that he was dishonoring his dead friends! However…it made sense. It really did. He shouldn't be mad at the world—he should be mad at himself for taking it the way he did. They didn't die just for him to run away and mope. It was so, so hard to let go of the negative feelings that had swarmed around him for years, but…maybe he could try. It was the least he could do for them.

He looked up at Robin, whose face still held that sad smile. She knew exactly what he had gone through, knew exactly how he felt. The knowledge that someone actually understood the burden felt foreign, but strangely comforting.

The cloud of depression and repressed anger that had constantly shrouded his normally acute mind seemed to break, allowing true clarity to shine through. It was almost like he was himself again, like the person Lyn had called friend.

"I figured it out."

"Figured what out?" Robin asked, pleased that he understood but confused.

"I know why I wanted to speak with you." He clarified.

"Oh. Well, why did you?"

"It is actually rather obvious, now that I think upon it." Mark said. "I needed to talk with someone who understood, so I would know that I am not alone in my pain."

"That makes sense." Robin smiled, a true, happy smile that had not graced her lips for months. "Alone together! Wait… that's kind of a paradox…well, you know what I mean."

He nodded. "However, there is something else."

"What is it?"

"As I am sure you are aware, this revelation does not mean that we have fixed ourselves completely. Far from it, actually. Although I feel lighter than I have in ages, I am not quite ready to see my friends again."

"Yeah, I'm not either. Healing takes time and we'll make mistakes, which kind of sucks, but we'll work on it." Robin

agreed.

"Why don't we accompany each other until then?" Mark offered, holding out his hand to her. "We can voyage again, except this time not to run away, but to find ourselves."

Robin looked down at his hand in surprise, then up at his face. His dark eyes, yesterday so dark and haunted, were lit up with a determined spark that mirrored her own. He even had a small smile tugging his lips upward, something that Robin suspected did not happen very often.

She returned the grin and shook his hand. "Deal."

The very next morning the two tacticians set out, the morning brighter than they could ever remember. Although they knew the road to restoration would not be easy or short, they were not alone anymore.

Someday, they would return to their friends as the strong people they once were. Of that they were certain. Until then, they would stay together, helping each other toward the light.